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ABSTRACT

A controversy currently exists in the literature regarding the stability of self-esteem across childhood. This ongoing study, initiated in 1987, was designed to respond to the limitations in the existing body of knowledge. It examines the influence of a variety of environmental variables, specifically home and school experiences, as well as gender, intelligence, personality characteristics, and academic achievement on self-esteem, from childhood into adolescence. Stability and change in self-esteem was assessed in 52 children across a 10-year span from age 7 to 17 using self-report, parent-report, and teacher-report measures to achieve a multi-dimensional appraisal of the child. Annual data from 1987 to 1991 showed no significant change in self-reported self-esteem across time in both sexes; no consistent correlation between self-esteem and intelligence quotient; and no significant relationship between level of self-esteem and amount of religious practice in the family. Findings also suggested that children identified with "high" self-esteem experience less fluctuation in self-esteem over time than children identified with a "moderate/low" level of self-esteem. Data collected and analyzed in the future will determine the reliability of these findings and are expected to provide greater depth to those reported here. (Author/LLL)

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Longitudinal Study of Self-Esteem in Children From 7-11 Years

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Running head: LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF SELF-ESTEEM

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Abstract

Begun in 1987, this longitudinal study assesses stability and change in self-esteem in 52 children across a 10-year span (from age 7 to 17). Self-esteem is assessed using self-report, parent-report, and teacher-report measures to achieve a multi-dimensional appraisal of the child. Predictor variables include measures of intelligence, school performance, personality, home environment, and classroom environment. Annual data from 1987 to 1991 found no significant change in self-reported self-esteem across time in both sexes, no consistent correlation between self-esteem and IQ, and an inverse relationship between level of self-esteem and amount of religious practice in the family although various types of family environments did not differ in mean self-esteem levels. Findings also suggest that children identified with "high" self-esteem experience less fluctuation in self-esteem over time than children identified with a "moderate/low" level of self-esteem.

Longitudinal Study of Self-Esteem in Children From 7-11 Years

A controversy currently exists in the literature regarding the stability of self-esteem across childhood. The findings of cross-sectional research indicated that self-esteem remained relatively stable throughout childhood (Wylie, 1979, cited in Demo & Savin-Williams, 1983a) or slightly increased (Demo & Savin-Williams, 1983a).

Studies that examined gender differences in levels of self-esteem as children transitioned into adolescence indicated that there were significant differences such that females experienced lower levels of self-esteem than males (Blyth, Carlton-Ford, and Simmons, 1983).

Coopersmith (1967), in his correlational study of pre-adolescent males, found significant correlations between self-esteem and three antecedent conditions, i.e., overall parental acceptance, clearly-defined behavioral limits, and respect for individual freedom within those limits. However, he and others (Demo & Savin-Williams, 1983b) concluded that there was still little known of the correlates, determinants and/or predictors of self-esteem and suggested the need for a comprehensive, longitudinal study of both males and females that employs a diversity of methods.

Therefore, this ongoing 10-year study, initiated in 1987,

was designed to respond to the limitations in the existing body of knowledge. It examines the influence of a variety of environmental variables, specifically home and school experiences, as well as gender, intelligence, personality characteristics, and academic achievement on self-esteem from childhood into adolescence. Analysis of the first five years data is included.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

First, does self-esteem remain stable over time in the age range of seven to eleven? It is hypothesized that a child with high self-esteem will experience greater stability over time. Children with moderate levels of self-esteem will experience greater fluctuation.

Second, previous studies find gender differences such that females experience significantly lower levels of self-esteem in childhood and adolescence than do males. Are these findings replicable in this longitudinal study? It is expected that the previous findings will be replicated and that additional information will be available regarding sex differences as they correlate with self-esteem.

Third, do the factors identified by Coopersmith (and others) as antecedents of high self-esteem hold up across the age range used in this study? What additional factors correlate with self-esteem at different age levels within individuals? It is hypothesized that additional variables will be identified which

predict fluctuations at different age levels.

Finally, are there significant positive correlations between self-reported self-esteem and parent/teacher measures of the child's self-esteem? It is hypothesized that a child with high self-esteem will experience greater concordance between his/her self-esteem level and parent/teacher appraisals. Conversely, a child with moderate self-esteem will experience less concordance between these measures.

Method

Subjects

The sample consists of 52 children, 25 females and 27 males from a predominantly caucasian, middle-class stratum. The children reside in 19 school districts (attend 24 elementary schools) mostly in the Southern California vicinity. Mean age in 1991 is 11. Children were selected by age, sex, and parental interest. There has been no attrition.

Design and Instrumentation

A prospective, longitudinal design is utilized. Data are collected annually (unless otherwise specified) as follows:

From the child:

1. Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967)
2. Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (1983)
3. WISC-R (administered twice, 1989 and 1993)

From the parent/guardian:

1. Developmental/demographic Questionnaire (once, with yearly updates)
2. Family Stressor Inventory
3. Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1975; given in 1987, 1990 and 1993)
4. Personality Inventory for Children (given in 1988 and 1992)
5. Teacher/Classroom Evaluation
6. Piers-Harris (parents respond the way they feel their child would)
7. Inferred Self-Concept Scale (McDaniel, 1973)
8. Final grade report

From the classroom teacher:

Inferred Self-Concept Scale

Results

Using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures, data from 1987 to 1991 found no significant change in self-reported self-esteem over time and no significant interaction by gender. (Table 1 and Table 2) These findings support previous studies which indicated that self-esteem remains stable during these childhood years.

However, parent reports of a child's self-esteem suggest a significant increase over a three-year period, while the teacher's

report of a child's self-esteem suggest that teachers have a tendency to rate girls higher than boys with increased age. (Table 3) Using a Pearson correlation, there is a significant relationship between self-reported self-esteem and a teacher's report child's self-esteem at ages 9: $r(46)=.40$ $p<.01$, and 11: $r(46)=.45$ $p<.01$.

The relationship between self-reported self-esteem and a parent's report of child's self-esteem was also significant at age 9: $r(45)=.36$ $p<.01$, and increased by age 11: $r(43)=.70$ $p<.01$. This suggests that as a child increases with age, there is more congruence between parent- and self-perception of a child's self-esteem. The relationship between parent and teacher reports of a child's self-esteem at age 11 is $r(43)=.66$ $p<.01$.

To assess individual differences in self-esteem, the fluctuation in self-esteem scores was calculated for each subject. A "variability" score was calculated by summing the difference in self-esteem scores for contiguous years and dividing by the number of years. Subjects were classified as having "high" self-esteem if their mean self-esteem score was 75 or over, and "low to moderate" if a score was below 75. Using an independent t-test, findings support the hypothesis that children with "high" self-esteem experience significantly less variability in self-reported self-esteem over time (mean variability=.68), than children with "moderate/low" levels of self-esteem (mean variability=-10.80), $t(46)= 2.10$, $p<.05$, two-tailed test. (Table 4)

No significant relationship was found between self-reported self-esteem over time and the amount of religious practice of the family. (Table 5) Interestingly, a significant relationship was found between self-reported self-esteem and IQ only at age 8: $r(48)=.30$, $p<.05$, and was not significant at age 7: $r(39)=.25$, age 9: $r(52)=.03$, age 10: $r(52)=.09$, and age 11: $r(51)=.15$.

Using one-way ANOVA, findings indicate that there is no significant difference ($F<1$; $p>.05$) in self-esteem level by type of family environment (measured by the "Family Environment Scale," Moos, 1975) at ages 9 and 11. (Table 6) This is in contrast to previous findings which suggested that children from family environments with structure and without conflict have a higher level of self-esteem. When family environment is further examined by looking at family orientations within each type, there is also no significant difference ($F>1$). (Table 7)

Summary

Results of the study argue in favor of stability of self-reported self-esteem throughout the childhood years of ages 7 to 11, and children identified with "high" self-esteem seem to experience more consistency in scores over time. IQ is not strongly correlated with self-reported self-esteem, and no relationship is significant between the amount of religious practice in the home and a child's level of self-esteem.

This is a preliminary report of this longitudinal work. Data collected and analyzed in the future will determine the

reliability of these findings and are expected to provide greater depth to those reported herein. Also, because of the breadth of subject and environmental variables, this study represents an enormous baseline of developmental information. Therefore, it should contribute significantly to current knowledge of self-esteem evolution in middle childhood and into adolescence.

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Table 1

Stability of Self-Reported Self-Esteem

Mean Score on Coopersmith's "Self-Esteem Inventory"

	1987*	1988	1989	1990	1991
Mean Age:	7	8	9	10	11
Girls	82.53	79.54	74.90	79.00	76.31
(n=22)	(9.95)	(12.01)	(14.00)	(14.04)	(18.83)
Boys	82.30	80.04	75.92	74.64	77.28
(n=25)	(10.08)	(12.40)	(16.64)	(15.97)	(15.14)
Total Group	82.53	79.80	75.44	76.68	76.83
(N=47)	(10.01)	(12.09)	(15.31)	(15.10)	(16.78)

Gender	F<1	p>.05
Time	F=1.57	p>.05
Gender x Time	F<1	p>.05

* 1987 data not included in final analyses due to 13 missing observations.

Table 2

Stability of Self-Reported vs. Parent-Reported Child's Self-Esteem

Mean Score on the Piers-Harris' "Children's Self-Concept Scale"

	Self-Reported			Parent-Reported*		
	1989	1990	1991	1989	1990	1991
Mean Age	9	10	11	9	10	11
Girls	61.08	59.70	59.16	63.68	66.63	68.52
(n=24)	(8.20)	(10.08)	(10.35)	(9.64)	(8.91)	(6.89)
Boys	62.00	60.60	60.69	66.85	66.75	68.90
(n=23)	(10.35)	(11.06)	(13.38)	(10.34)	(11.85)	(10.17)
Total Group	61.53	60.14	59.91	65.30	66.69	68.71
(N=47)	(9.22)	(10.46)	(11.82)	(10.00)	(10.39)	(8.62)
	Gender F<1 p>.05			Gender F<1 p>.05		
	Time F<1 p>.05			Time F=4.26 p<.05		
	Gender x Time F<1 p>.05			Gender x Time F<1 p>.05		

* Parents responded how they felt their child would answer.

Table 3

Stability of Teacher-Reported Self-Esteem

Mean Score on McDaniel's "Inferred Self-Concept Scale"*

	1988	1989	1990	1991
Mean Age:	8	9	10	11
Girls	120.60	128.10	127.70	126.50
(n=20)	(18.90)	(14.84)	(19.42)	(15.75)
Boys	123.61	120.50	116.00	118.27
(n=18)	(17.82)	(15.91)	(20.88)	(17.87)
Total Group	122.02	124.50	122.15	122.60
(N=38)	(18.21)	(15.63)	(20.71)	(17.07)

Gender	F=1.58	p>.05
Time	F<1	p>.05
Gender x Time	F=3.18	p<.05

* A behavior scale, completed annually by each child's classroom teacher.

Table 4

Mean Group Variability of Self-Reported Self-Esteem from 1988 to 1991

Group	Mean Variability
"High" Self-Esteem (n=32)	.68
"Moderate/Low" Self-Esteem (n=15)	-10.80

$t(46)=2.10$ $p<.05$, two-tailed

NOTE: A mean self-esteem score was computed for each child, the children were then placed into groups according to score (i.e., a score 75 or more on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory is identified as "high" self-esteem; below 75 is considered "moderate/low"). The mean variability of each group was then computed, and analyzed using an independent t-test.

Table 5

Religious Practice and Self-Esteem

	Mean Score on Coopersmith's "Self-Esteem Inventory"			
	1988	1989	1990	1991
Mean Age	8	9	10	11
Religious Practice				
Attends Regularly	79.80	75.92	77.46	79.19
(n=26)	(12.81)	(12.56)	(12.75)	(15.61)
Attends Rarely	78.00	67.69	70.30	69.53
(n=13)	(12.13)	(18.63)	(20.47)	(21.10)
Never Attends	82.75	86.50	76.68	81.00
(n=8)	(12.09)	(11.35)	(7.15)	(8.81)

Religion	F=2.95	p=.06
Time	F=1.06	p>.05
Religion x Time	F=1.16	p>.05

Table 6

Family Environment Type and Self-Reported Self-Esteem

	Mean Score on Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory	
	1989	1991
Mean Age:	9	11
Family Environment		
Type 1*	75.50	76.21
	(n=28)	(n=41)
Type 2**	74.60	76.00
	(n=10)	(n=9)
Type 3***	73.45	00.00
	(n=11)	(n=0)
	F<1	F<1

NOTE: Using the Family Environment Scale by Moos:

* Personal-Growth oriented: include high scores in one of the following four: independence, achievement, intellectual/cultural, or moral-religious.

** Relationship oriented: include high scores on cohesion, expressiveness or conflict.

*** System Maintenance oriented: used to describe a disorganized home environment.

Table 7

Significance of Specific Family Orientations on Self-Reported Self-Esteem at Ages 9 and 11

	Mean Score on Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory	
	1989	1991
Mean Age:	9	11
Family Orientation*		
Type 1		
Independence	72.25 (n=8)	64.66 (n=3)
Achievement	70.00 (n=2)	71.00 (n=2)
Moral-Religious (Structured)	77.41 (n=17)	78.31 (n=22)
Moral-Religious (Unstructured)	71.20 (n=5)	74.28 (n=7)
Intellectual-Cultural	72.00 (n=4)	78.00 (n=7)
Type 2		
Support	73.55 (n=9)	74.50 (n=8)
Conflict	00.00 (n=0)	88.00 (n=1)
Type 3		
Disorganized	76.66 (n=6)	00.00 (n=0)
	F<1	F<1

* Defined by Moos in his "Family Environment Scale."

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